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**Committee Assignments**

- Ways & Means, Ranking Republican
- International Trade & Economic Development
- Rules

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Again, thanks to all of you who contacted my office or visited me during the session. Your input is invaluable to me as I make decisions on your behalf in Olympia.

Please always feel free to contact me to express your opinions on matters of state government. I am here to serve you. Thanks again!

# Sen. Joe Zarelli's

## UPDATE FROM OLYMPIA

4/27/05

Dear Friends,

Thankfully, the Legislature has finished on time and as such, this will be one of my last weekly updates for the year.

The Legislature recently voted for a transportation package that included a gas tax increase. Many of you have expressed concerns and opposition to my voting yes, and many of you have been supportive of my decision. Please let me briefly explain the reason for my vote.

First of all, the Democrat majority in the House and Senate had already committed to the gas tax increase. The last time we voted on a transportation package that upped the gas tax, I voted no and our region's elected officials were left out of the negotiations and our district's transportation needs were left unmet.

By lending my support to the transportation package, I was included in the intense negotiation sessions. This led to a large commitment to the critical transportation projects in our region:

- \* I-205/Mill Plain Interchange
- \* SR 502 widening from I-5 to Battle Ground
- \* SR 501/Ridgefield Interchange
- \* SR 14 Camas/Washougal Widening
- \* SR 500/St. Johns Blvd/Interchange
- \* SR 500/NE /42<sup>nd</sup> Ave and 54<sup>th</sup> Ave
- \* Cascades Trainsets Overhaul
- \* Salmon Creek I-5/139<sup>th</sup> Interchange
- \* I-205 widening

Secondly, these negotiations led to the inclusion of true, independent performance audits for transportation-related agencies. This is a tremendous victory. We adopted standards being promoted and supported by several conservative think tanks and organizations. We have set a precedent for further efficiencies and I intend to keep fighting for more performance audits for all of state government.

Finally, I insisted that our proposal *require* the passage of a regional plan *before* state dollars kick in for Puget Sound mega projects (Alaskan Way Viaduct, etc.). The people in WA State should not have to pay entirely for Puget Sound mega projects.

On another note, I voted against the final two-year operating budget. The final budget actually spends more money than the House or Senate version! The conference committee on the budget just decided to "buy" each other's "wants" instead of prioritizing. As I've said before, the new budget is 12 percent increase over the previous two-year budget and "saves" money by not paying our legal obligations to the state's pension fund, setting us up for at least a billion dollar shortfall in two years!